

Intra-household Inter-dog Aggression (IDA)

By Linda Porter

When you have dogs in your household that don't get along it can be a very difficult problem to deal with because it is a 24-7 problem. Some of the emotions that dog owners may be going through can include lots of stress and anxiety about when another fight may occur, and other emotions like hopelessness, anger, embarrassment and even guilt about the possibility of having to make tough decisions like re-homing one of their dogs. Hearing or seeing a dog fight can be very traumatic and scary, especially if there are injuries to humans or dogs, and it can be difficult to get relief because everybody in the household must be on top of and always follow through with management strategies to prevent an incident.

Realistic expectations for intrahousehold aggression issues

So, let's talk truthfully about outcomes in these types of cases. It's important that owners have a realistic expectation when working through intra-household dog aggression problems and moving through a behavior modification plan with a trainer. Statistically, being able to completely resolve the problems between 2 or more dogs is slightly better 50/50. It's going to be around 58% for female-to-female aggression cases and just slightly better in the male-to-male and male-to-female cases depending on the studies you read. Just like in marriage counseling, we try our best with the dogs, but we cannot guarantee any outcome, or, that the dogs will get along again, especially if the conflicts have been severe and frequent. That being said, there are options available that can help assist owners in managing dogs while working with a trainer to try and modify behavior and get things under control.

Management Strategies

- Management and safety for everyone in the household--including dogs, is your number one priority when working through aggression issues, especially when fights are getting sever. Preventing fights from happening should be a top consideration. Separating the dogs immediately after discovering an issue is the safest option and helps to ensure that no dog or human will be injured while you work through a training plan manage and or resolve the problem.
- There should be 2 layers of protection in the form of barriers that separate areas of the home if possible. Rearranging things in the home to provide safe separation like baby gates or exercise pens to section off areas of the household. The reason for this is so the dogs cannot go nose to nose. Blocking the dog's visual ability to see the other dog by using sheets or blankets over gates or something else to block visual communications can also be helpful. You can also use crates. They do somewhat impede the dog's enrichment throughout the day and there is a risk that if one dog is not crated it can stress the dog that is in the crate because it limits the crated dog's movement and space, so be thoughtful when using them with those factors in mind while working

through a behavioral modification plan with your trainer, the goal being to try and get the dogs back together through a safe, systematic process.

- Manage arousal hotspots and coveted resources: Areas where dogs tend to become highly aroused can be a catalyst for starting fights. Tight spaces, gatherings at doors or gates in anticipation of walks or a chance to burst outside or come in, a favorite person's arrival home, people arriving at the door, and feeding times. Resources such as food, toys, preferred resting areas or attention from a favored human can also cause conflict that leads to fights. Hotspots and resources can be highly loaded for many dogs and a precursor to aggression. Narrow down potential hotspots and highly coveted resources and manage dogs in or around these areas and items. In other words, avoid exposing your dogs to overly arousing or loaded situations (especially tight areas) or coveted resources when they are together. If conflicts are breaking out over resources such as treats, attention, toys, or resting areas, keep dogs separated when allowing them to enjoy these things. If dogs are fighting during feeding times, separate them and feed each dog alone in a secure area.

Education

- Learning to recognize potential conflict before a fight starts is critical. You must be able to recognize when something is about to occur. Get educated by your trainer on how to read your dog's body language for signs of potential aggression. Understanding your dog's body language can help you intervene before conflicts start.

Intervention

- Know when and how to intervene. One way to safely intervene before a fight starts is to move away from the dogs and call one or both away in moments when you notice subtle communications between dogs that can become problematic. Calling the dog(s) away can defuse the tension if there is a potential conflict starting to brew. One thing you should *not* do is step towards the dogs, reach for a collar, or start yelling. Sometimes this can throw more fuel on an already tense interaction, and you may be more likely to get an explosion. Stay calm!
- If you have a big dog attacking a small dog, picking up the smaller dog may result in you getting injured. Try to avoid this if possible. If you do have to pick up the smaller dog, make sure you have a safe place you can quickly put it such as a closed room, closet, in a dryer, behind a fence, or anywhere that provides temporary protection. If you are outside, a trash can, vehicle or shed could work. Use anything close by that provides temporary protection.
- Learn how to properly break up a dog fight. Have appropriate tools like spray shield, shake cans, spray bottles or an airhorn available for low level fights and learn how to use them. Vice grip type fights may require other tools or methods like a break stick,

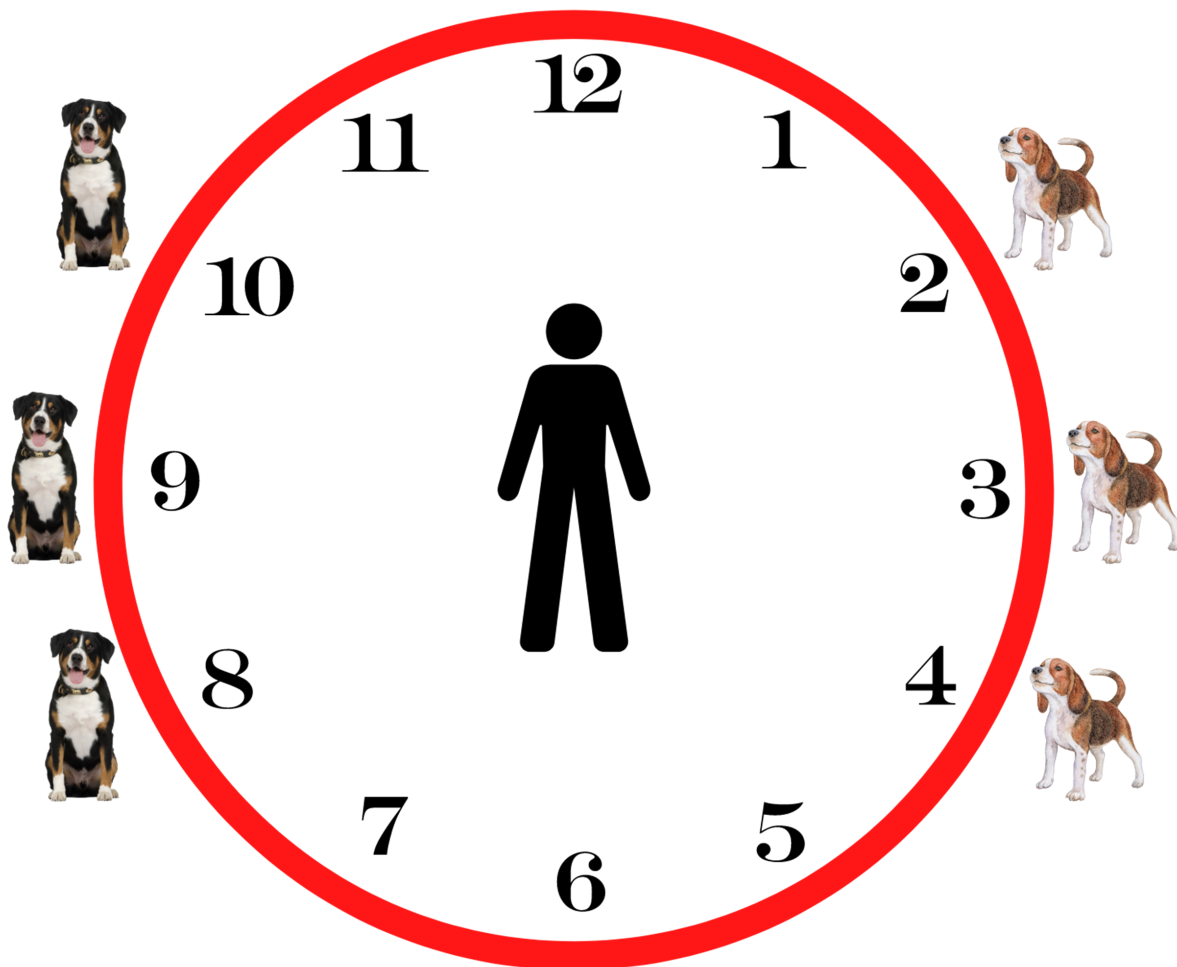
spray shield directly up the dog's nose, "feeding the bite", (this involves pushing one dog into the other dog rather than trying to pull them apart) or choking one dog off with a slip lead. These methods should be taught by a trainer that is experienced in dealing with aggression and practiced by owners on fake dogs before they may have to use them. Make tools available and easily accessible in all areas of the house where there may be conflict if the dogs get together. It's like keeping a fire extinguisher on hand. You may never need it, but you will be glad you have it if you do.

Other options to consider:

- Re-homing one dog. Dogs that are starting fights can often live in a home with no other dogs.
- Permanent separation and management in the home.
- Temporary boarding for one dog until a safe management plan is in place.
- Last resort: Euthanasia for one dog for fights that are severe with serious injuries and where a dog cannot be rehabilitated or re-homed.

Safety and Management

At least 4 hours of separation



Always use the "4 hours of separation" technique when there is potential for dogs to fight over resources such as food, treat time, preferred resting areas, toys or attention

The human always stays between the two dogs at the 12 o'clock position. Both dogs should always be positioned as shown in the chart in relationship to the human with the human in between the dogs. This allows the human to move towards the dog that is aggressing and quickly intervene before a fight breaks out. It also leaves enough space between 2 dogs so that they are less likely to get close enough to grab one another.